

Fighters with Class

By Skip Williams



Play a fighter, said your friends. It's easy for a beginner to play and gives you plenty of action. But is a fighter just a sword-swinging automaton, or does he have more to offer?

The Pros and Cons of a Fighter

At first glance, the fighter seems like the simplest character to play -- a combat machine suitable for newcomers to the game and for players who lack the drive or imagination to create more complex characters. But first impressions often prove false, and though a fighter can certainly be easy to play, dismissing him as a dull character is definitely a mistake. A well-constructed fighter, played with zeal and presence of mind, is a satisfying character and an indispensable member of any adventuring party.

Fighter Assets

The fighter class provides plenty of tools for effective adventuring. Below are several assets you have going for you when you choose a fighter.

- **High Hit Points:** The fighter's 10-sided Hit Dice let him absorb lots of damage and keep right on going.
- **Good Armor Class:** The fighter's class features don't include much in the way of special defenses, but his ability to wear any kind of armor and use any kind of shield usually gives him an impressive Armor Class. This factor combined with his high hit points makes for a great defensive package.
- **Good Attack Bonus:** A fighter's base attack bonus is +1 per level, which is the best in the game. Thus, fighters can dish out damage as well as they can take it.
- **Good Fortitude Saves:** A fighter uses the best save progression in the game for Fortitude saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This natural resilience helps him resist most effects that attack his body, such as poison, polymorphing, and energy draining.
- **Good Weapon Selection:** Because a fighter can use any simple or martial weapon, he's a deadly opponent no matter what weapon he wields.
- **Many Bonus Feats:** Fighters gain a generous selection of bonus feats. Though they're mostly combat-oriented, these feats allow you great flexibility in tailoring a character to your taste.

Fighter Weaknesses

As with any class in the D&D game, the fighter's advantages come at a price. Here are a few of the disadvantages you should keep in mind if you're considering a fighter character.

- **Low Skill Points:** At a mere two skill points per level, most fighters don't accumulate many skill ranks,

even with quadruple skill points at 1st level.

- **Poor Reflex and Will Saves:** Fighters have the worst progression for Reflex and Will saves in the game (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Thus, they aren't good at avoiding most kinds of magical attacks.
- **Low Mobility:** A fighter's reliance on heavy armor tends to make him a slow mover on the battlefield.

Playing a Classy Fighter

People who play great fighters usually use the following techniques.

Be Prepared to Lead

A fighter's natural place in an adventuring party is the front rank, because he has to be able to place himself between his more vulnerable compatriots and the enemy. In like manner, many successful encounters begin when the party fighter kicks in a door and charges into battle. Simply because of this front-line placement, a fighter often bears the onus of party leadership.

But that leadership should have a cerebral element as well. Because of his place in the front rank, the fighter is in a good position to decide where the party should go, so it pays for him to think about the group's next move. It also pays for him to consider the party's marching order while everyone else is preparing for a play session. Besides its general utility, such planning gives his player something to do while the spellcaster players are choosing spells.

Friends in Need

Your fighter's combat ability provides a foundation for the party's overall fighting power. If you waste or misuse that ability, the whole party suffers. Likewise, the fighter needs the support of the rest of the party just to survive. So it pays for him to know how to scratch the backs of his fellow PCs.

The Party's Stealth Factor: If your group has a rogue, ranger, bard, or monk, that character can serve as a scout for the rest of the party. But a rogue playing that role will get into trouble sooner or later -- perhaps by falling into a pit, or by meeting a hidden monster, or by just plain offending someone. At such junctures, your timely intervention can save the scout's skin. In addition, a rogue or other character with the sneak attack ability needs combat support in the form of an ally who can help her flank enemies. So get used to fighting in partnership with such characters and make sure you incorporate the advantage it provides into your tactics.

The Party's Arcane Spellcaster: Wizards, sorcerers, and bards can pack a real punch with their spells, and they often serve as the party's heavy artillery. But since such characters usually have poor Armor Classes and very few hit points, they must rely on you to keep the opposition at a distance.

The Party's Divine Spellcaster: Get friendly and stay friendly with your party's cleric, druid, or paladin. This character's healing spells can keep you on your feet longer while you're hacking your way through foes.

Some Key Equipment

Fighters rely heavily on their gear, so it pays to collect the right equipment. The essentials include the following.

- **Armor and Shield:** If you're a fighter, it generally pays to get the best armor you can afford because you'll need that boost to your Armor Class. Plan to carry a shield (heavy or tower) unless you want to use a two-handed weapon. And don't overlook other defensive items, such as *rings of protection* and *amulets of natural armor*. Keep in mind that several lesser items that stack give you better protection, and at a cheaper price, than one big item.

If you do a lot of wilderness adventuring, consider some backup armor, such as suit of studded leather (or a mithral chain shirt, if you can afford it) that you can wear at night. If you try to sleep in heavy armor you'll have penalties the next day. But if you sleep in your skivvies, you'll be in trouble if you're attacked in the night.

- **Primary Melee Weapon:** Choose a martial or exotic weapon with a good damage rating and a decent capacity for making critical hits. A bastard sword or dwarven waraxe is a great choice because you can wield it in one hand if you take the right feat. Doing so lets you deal significant damage while still gaining the Armor Class benefits of a shield. For sheer damage-dealing ability, though, nothing beats a two-handed weapon, such as a greatsword or greataxe.
- **Backup Melee Weapon:** Always have a light weapon or two handy. A light slashing weapon, such as a dagger or hand axe, can help get you out of a tight spot (for example, being swallowed whole by a big monster). It also pays to have a hefty weapon on hand in case you lose your primary one or find that it isn't effective. Make sure this weapon deals a different kind of damage than your primary weapon does. For example, if you normally use a bastard sword (a slashing weapon) consider a morningstar (which deals both bludgeoning and piercing damage) as a backup.
- **Ranged Weapon:** Your forte is melee combat, but a ranged weapon comes in handy for those times when you can't reach your foes. It also makes up nicely for your general lack of mobility. A composite bow is a great choice because you can spend a little extra money on it and add your Strength bonus to damage.

About the Authors

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies, and he served as the sage of *Dragon Magazine* for eighteen years. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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